CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 31 July 1997, at 11.30 a.m.

President: Mrs. Krasnohorská (Slovakia)

GE.97-63729 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 772nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Allow me first of all, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to welcome the Deputy Director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Ambassador Ralph Earle, who will be our first speaker. The fact that he is back with us today, at a time when the Conference is actively seeking a basis on which it can get down to its substantive work, testifies to the continuing interest which his Government takes in our Conference. I am sure that his statement will be followed with deep interest by everyone. I invite Ambassador Earle to take the floor.

Mr. EARLE (United States of America): I can assure you that my tardiness does not reflect any disinterest in the activities of this Conference. We were informed that the meeting was 11.30, but I apologize in any event.

As you indicated, it has been some time since I have been here, a little over two years since I last had the honour to address the Conference on Disarmament, although I have been here on a number of occasions since then. But it is a pleasure to return and to address a body substantially enlarged in membership.

May I, at the outset, express the thanks of the United States delegation for your able and determined efforts to advance the important work of this body, Madam President? The Conference's decision to appoint four special coordinators at the end of June, in particular the Special Coordinator for anti-personnel landmines, was due in no small part to your leadership, and we will support fully your continuing efforts in the coming weeks, as well as those of the four special coordinators.

This morning I would like to begin by recalling President Clinton's statement to the United Nations General Assembly last 24 September, the day he became the first leader to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the text of which was negotiated in this very room. He underlined the importance of the CTBT and, at the same time, outlined an agenda for further progress to reduce the threats posed by weapons of mass destruction and other weapons that kill and maim indiscriminately. On that day in September in New York, he identified six objectives that affect us all: bringing the Chemical Weapons Convention into force; bringing START II into force and negotiating further reductions in the United States and Russian nuclear arsenals; strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; strengthening compliance with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention; negotiating a global ban on anti-personnel landmines; and negotiating a fissile material cut-off treaty in this Conference. I would like to review these objectives with you and your colleagues, and to assess briefly how far we have moved toward accomplishing them. Overall, since the President spoke at the General Assembly, we have made significant progress on the four objectives that do not involve the Conference on Disarmament, namely the first four.

(Mr. Earle, United States)

First, as we all know, the Chemical Weapons Convention entered into force on 29 April, and the first Conference of States Parties was held in The Hague in May, and initial on-site inspections have already begun, including inspections in the United States. The parties have begun global implementation. States parties have made declarations that will add to our knowledge of global chemical capabilities. In short, this Convention, dismissed by some as a "feel-good" arms control treaty, is already demonstrating its value, and I take no small satisfaction in the fact that the United States is an original party to this Convention, negotiated so painstakingly in this Conference. As of last week, the Convention boasted more than 165 signatories and almost 100 parties. We urge those States that have not yet ratified to do so promptly, and we urge those States that have not signed to sign and ratify equally promptly.

Second, the United States and the Russian Federation have taken further steps to reduce the number of their nuclear weapons. We are pursuing the implementation of treaties that go far beyond anything imagined to be practical in the early 1970s or even in the mid-1980s. We are committed to achieving, in the words of the May 1995 NPT "Principles and objectives" decision, the objective of "systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally".

Last March, at the Helsinki summit, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin agreed that after the START II Treaty enters into force, the United States and Russia will immediately begin negotiations on a START III agreement. That agreement, once implemented, would reduce the number of deployed United States and Russian strategic warheads to a level of 2,000 to 2,500. This would constitute approximately an 80 per cent reduction from peak cold war levels and go significantly beyond START II, which already requires reductions of more than two thirds.

In an important new development, President Clinton and President Yeltsin also agreed at Helsinki that the START III negotiations will be the first strategic arms control negotiations to address "measures relating to the transparency of strategic nuclear warhead inventories and the destruction" of such warheads. In previous strategic arms control agreements, the two sides had agreed to limit and reduce launchers and delivery vehicles. These new measures will promote the irreversibility of deep reductions. To reach this objective, of course, Russia must first ratify START II, but we believe the Helsinki understandings should facilitate that ratification.

Third, the process of strengthening the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the cornerstone of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and an integral part of the international security system, is well under way. In April, the first of three Preparatory Committee meetings for the Year 2000 Review Conference successfully launched the "strengthened treaty review process" called for by the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. This meeting established a constructive basis for the development of recommendations on principles, objectives, and ways to achieve the full implementation of the NPT, including universal adherence.

(Mr. Earle, United States)

We welcome the accessions to the NPT of Angola, Djibouti, and Oman, and the 20 June announcement by Brazil that it intends to join the NPT. When Brazil does become a party, only four States will remain outside the treaty regime.

Effective international safeguards are a sine qua non for effective non-proliferation. This past May, agreement was reached on a model protocol that will improve the efficiency and strengthen the effectiveness of safeguards, and enhance the capability of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to detect undeclared nuclear activities. These efforts mark a successful conclusion of IAEA's so-called programme "93 plus 2", begun after the discoveries of Iraq's clandestine nuclear weapon programme. This strengthening of IAEA safeguards will significantly reduce the danger that any nation can secretly acquire a nuclear arsenal.

Fourth, I am pleased to note that the Ad Hoc Group on the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) is now meeting in Geneva and will conclude its current session tomorrow. In his September address at the United Nations, President Clinton called for the urgent conclusion of a legally-binding protocol to strengthen compliance with the Convention. From that we will continue to work aggressively to achieve that goal as soon as possible. Strengthening confidence in compliance with the BWC is a critical task, especially in light of troubling attempts to develop and deploy biological and toxin weapons.

Progress on meeting these objectives is tangible and ongoing. However, the relative state of affairs with respect to an anti-personnel landmine (APL) ban and a cut-off treaty, the two items for which the Conference on Disarmament has a leading role, regrettably appears rather bleak, despite their high priority.

On the matter of a global ban on anti-personnel landmines, we congratulate Ambassador Campbell of Australia on his appointment as the Special Coordinator for this issue. We have great confidence in his abilities, and we hope that his efforts will result in the early beginning of negotiations in this Conference to ban anti-personnel landmines.

We also commend the Government of Canada for its initiative on anti-personnel landmines. The Ottawa Process has added strength and momentum to the comprehensive work on landmines that must be undertaken in the CD. We hope that the Ottawa Process will achieve successes that the Conference on Disarmament is not able to accomplish immediately. The Ottawa Process and the CD negotiations each make a useful contribution and each augments the other. In a word, they are "complementary". There is no reason why either one has to interfere with the other.

The CD can accomplish objectives that the Ottawa Process is not expected to achieve. The States expected to sign the Ottawa treaty are those that are prepared now to make a commitment to eliminate all of their anti-personnel landmines by a fixed date. On the other hand, the CD includes many States that are not prepared to take that step today, States that give us little reason to believe they will sign the Ottawa treaty later.

(Mr. Earle, United States)

The value of negotiating an APL ban in the CD can be confirmed simply by looking around this chamber. As of 27 June more than half of the CD members, including the United States, had not associated themselves with the Brussels Declaration of the Ottawa Process. As the distinguished representative of Ukraine pointed out in his speech this past Tuesday, these countries make up half or more of the world's population and economic output and half or more of the world's historical activity with regard to anti-personnel landmines, and many of them have security concerns about eliminating their landmines in the near future.

We believe negotiations in the CD can take these concerns, including our own, into account. Thus, while the CD's task will take longer to accomplish than the Ottawa Process, the resulting treaty will, unlike the Ottawa Process, extend the reach of an APL ban to the major producers, stockpilers and exporters of anti-personnel landmines.

The importance of such a worldwide ban is illustrated by considering the many casualties caused by anti-personnel landmines around the globe by groups and individuals who have demonstrated no respect for international agreements or humanitarian concerns, and the only way to stop the irresponsible use of anti-personnel landmines is to eliminate the source of those mines. To accomplish that objective, an agreement must include the potential exporters. Many such exporters are far more likely to support an agreement negotiated by them, among others, in this Conference that, inter alia, would ban the export of anti-personnel landmines.

This brings us to the issue of an APL negotiating mandate in the Conference here. In his intervention before this body on 15 May, ACDA Director John Holum underlined strong United States support for the mandate proposed by the Japanese and Hungarian delegations. When we begin work, we fully anticipate that many members of this body will offer proposals that will help shape that agreement. A broad mandate will not prejudice anyone's position in the negotiations and will permit those negotiations to begin at once. However, if it were useful to elaborate on or modify this text to address specific concerns of other delegations, such as the need for a step-by-step approach, we believe the Special Coordinator should consider such elaborations or modifications. We should then be able, on an urgent basis, to decide on an acceptable mandate as a framework for negotiations.

Now let me turn to a cut-off treaty. The negotiation and successful conclusion of a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) by the Conference on Disarmament would be an important measure in the overall process of nuclear disarmament. It would mandate verification of all fissile material production, specifically reprocessing and enrichment, and the newly produced fissile material in all countries that now have unsafeguarded production or production facilities. The treaty would apply, without discrimination, to all parties, including the nuclear-weapon States. It would codify the policy declarations by nuclear-weapon States on the cessation of fissile material production for nuclear weapons into an international legal, and verifiable, obligation, making the reversal of those policies far more difficult.

(Mr. Earle, United States)

I urge each of you to consider the reinforcing impact that an FMCT would have on parallel efforts to dismantle nuclear warheads, to place fissile material that is determined to be excess to national security requirements under safeguards, and to achieve even deeper nuclear weapons reductions leading toward their eventual elimination. These efforts could be harmed if unsafeguarded fissile material production is not banned.

Without a cut-off treaty, the chances of achieving the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament would be decreased significantly. In looking ahead toward post-START III negotiations, nuclear arms reductions would be far more difficult without a ban on new fissile material production for weapons embodied in a treaty that provides confidence that the international community would detect clandestine production. As President Clinton said in his January message to this Conference, "effectively cutting off the spigot for more nuclear weapons is a necessary step toward, and would greatly contribute to, the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament".

The CD's strength is negotiating detailed agreements. The CD now has a window of opportunity to negotiate a fissile material cut-off and a ban on anti-personnel landmines. We should act now while that window is open.

Despite the clear benefits of CD negotiations to ban anti-personnel landmines and the production of fissile material for nuclear explosives, some States have proposed conditions that have impeded real work. The first condition proposes that the "price", if you will, for negotiations should be the establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament. A second and related condition is that such a committee should negotiate the elimination of nuclear weapons by a set date or in a "time-bound" manner.

The United States delegation has repeatedly made it clear how counter-productive these conditions are or would be. Accepting this sort of linkage would hurt, not help, the prospects of productive negotiations.

The only realistic way to pursue nuclear reductions is through the bilateral START process and eventually through a process involving other nuclear-weapon States. I believe that most members recognize this. I also believe that most members recognize that the so-called "time-bound nuclear disarmament" approach is not realistic, despite any superficial appeal. I can assure you, and this is from personal experience, that had the Soviet Union and the United States decided in the late 1960s to negotiate a time-bound framework for nuclear disarmament, rather than SALT I and the SALT II, we would still be there talking about hypothetical conditions and scenarios.

Let me conclude by recalling ACDA Director Holum's observation here on 15 May that the future effectiveness of this body depends in large measure on whether it can rise to the challenges of the banning of the production of fissile material and of eliminating anti-personnel landmines. Of the six objectives President Clinton set out over 10 months ago, it is only on these two that progress has been so slow. We have expended too much time with too little result, and the future of this body appears not much brighter today than it did in May, but let us change this assessment by September.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank Ambassador Earle for his statement. I have no further speakers listed for today. Do any other delegations wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none.

Ambassador Mounir Zahran of Egypt has asked me to inform you that he will be holding informal open-ended consultations on the improved and effective functioning of the Conference on Disarmament on Tuesday 12 August at 3 p.m. in this room. My consultations show that delegations appreciate the work performed by Ambassador Mounir Zahran. Delegations have expressed the wish that the three other special coordinators should hold informal open-ended consultations. I would therefore like to encourage them to consider the possibility of holding such consultations.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 7 August, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.